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# IRISH BIBLICAL STUDIES

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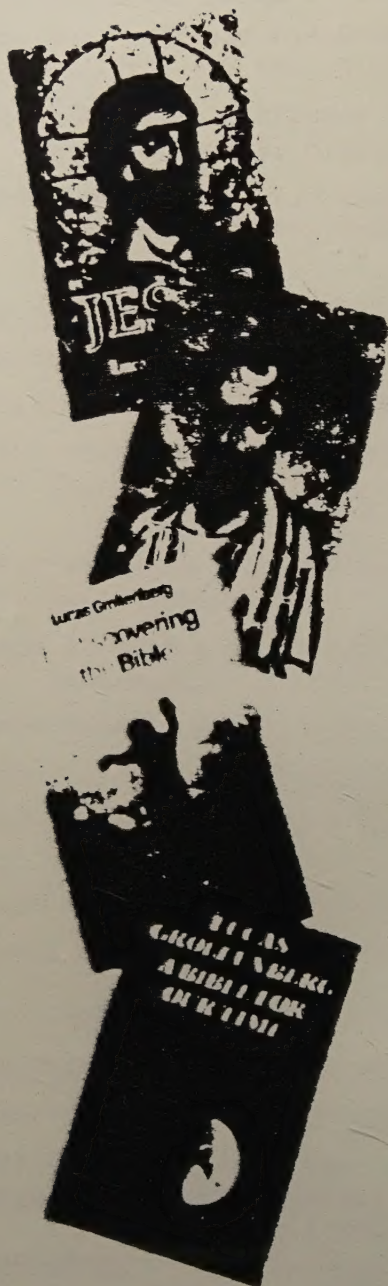
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MARK: SOME PROBLEMS.

ERNEST BEST

This is not a survey of modern work on the Gospel according to Mark but a brief examination of three areas about which there has been much discussion. These areas are: (1) When we speak of the Gospel according to Mark, in how far was Mark a real author? (2) What was his main purpose in writing? (3) What was the occasion of his writing?

Prior to the nineteenth century the Gospel of Mark was largely neglected; the material it contained was all incorporated in Matthew or Luke and there was no need to study it separately. If the relations of the first three gospels to one another were considered at all the solution of Augustine was widely accepted: Mark was an abbreviation of Matthew. In the nineteenth century with interest growing in the historical Jesus Mark came to be accepted as the first gospel to have been written and therefore the primary source of information about Jesus. In this century after the first world war attention passed from the historical Jesus to the life of the first Christians, and the individual paragraphs of the Gospel rather than the Gospel as a whole were used to throw light on the life of the Christian community. The form critical movement was interested in the period between the resurrection and the writing of the gospels and used the material in the gospels to illuminate that period. In turn after the second world war form criticism was succeeded by redaction criticism. The discussion of Mark's gospel which flowed from this began with Willi Marxsen's book Mark the Evangelist; /1 note the title: it is not a book about the gospel but a book about the Evangelist.

However it is not strictly correct to trace the initiation of the modern discussion of Mark's gospel to Marxsen. We need to go back to Wrede. His book, The Messianic Secret,

/2 is the real turning point in Markan studies; its effect is still being felt. /3 It is unnecessary to follow out the particular theory of Wrede about the messianic secret; there are few who hold it today in precisely the form in which he advanced it; but the facts within the gospel to which he pointed still require explanation; why when the demons confess Jesus as Son of God are they told to be quiet? why are those who are healed told to say nothing about the

healing? why are the disciples told that an understanding of the parables can only be given to them in secret and is not for outsiders? why are the disciples so blind to Jesus' true nature? where showed that Mark wrote with a theological purpose in mind and that theological tendencies displayed themselves in the way in which he ordered and used the traditional material. The immediate effect of his book, taken in conjunction with the work of Albert Schweitzer /4 and Johannes Weiss /5 on the eschatological dimension of Jesus' teaching, was to slow up the flow of production of lives of Jesus. The form critics in their turn accepted that the gospels were penetrated by theological tendencies and so when they examined the individual pericopae to place them within the community they endeavoured at the same time to eliminate them from the theological tendencies of the evangelists.

The fresh step of the redaction critics was to turn our attention to what the form critics had eliminated- the theological tendencies. To put this another way: the form critics attempted to dissolve the glue which held the Gospel together so that they could look at the separate incidents in isolation from one another; Marxsen in his work on Mark was interested in the glue itself. By examining the glue it might be possible to learn what was the life-setting of the whole gospel, the nature of the theology which held it together and how the two inter-related. This immediately raises the question of the extent to which Mark was an author or editor.

Two extreme positions are possible in respect of Mark as author. He may freely have composed everything in the gospel, and it would then be classed as a work of fiction; he may simply have repeated the material as it was given him by Peter, his role being nothing other than that of a translator or scribe. The first view is untenable because at least some of the material in the Gospel can be found in pre-Markan references in Paul, e.g., the death and resurrection of Jesus, the eucharist. Those who maintain the second position normally do so because of their desire to assert that everything in Mark is historically true; a



glance at a synopsis of the first three gospels shows that Matthew and Luke vary many of the details in Mark; if they felt themselves free to do this may not the details have been varied earlier than Mark? Some element of composition was therefore involved in the production of the gospel and on the other hand it is not entirely fictional.

We can thus re-phrase the original question by asking 'How does Mark use the material of the tradition?' 'To what extent was he its master?' Bultmann /6 denies he was its master. At this point we have two factors to take into account. (1) The material he used was known to his community. There is no reason to suppose that Mark went off on a research trip to Palestine and unearthed new material about Jesus either from eyewitnesses or from diaries and letters. He stayed where he was in his community and he used the material already circulating in it. It would therefore have been exceedingly difficult for him to have invented new incidents or even to have entirely rewritten known ones. (2) This is confirmed when we examine the way in which he has used his material; he allows evidence of its earlier existence to remain within it; that is to say, he is conservative in respect of the material he uses. /7 A few examples will show this: (a) In the threefold prediction by Jesus of his suffering, death and resurrection (8.31; 9.31; 10.33f.) there are each time unusual features: the use of 'kill' instead of 'crucify', of 'after three days' instead of 'on the third day' which was the normal church phrase of Mark's period (cf. 16.1-8), of 'he will rise' instead of 'he will be raised' (in effect two different Greek verbs are used here; the normal one, *egeirein* is that which appears in 'he will be raised'). While there have been scholars /8 who have concluded from these three facts that Mark had a large hand in shaping the form of the three predictions the much more obvious solution is that he is using tradition, which he did not correct to bring it into line with normal contemporary church usage. (b) When in one of his summaries (3.11f) he refers to the demons confessing Jesus he says that they acknowledge him as Son of God; but in



23-26, from the tradition, the demon confesses Jesus as 'the holy one of God'; Mark does not change this to stress his own favourite confessional term 'Son of God'. (c) At 9.29f. Mark reports Jesus as making a promise to those who have left family and land; in the context of the gospel this promise is made to Peter; Peter however was not a farmer but a fisherman; Mark does not therefore alter the traditional form of the saying to make it fit the context in which he uses it. We may conclude that though Mark wrote summaries, made connections between incidents, modified the detail of incidents, he did not usually invent new incidents.

Those who hold that Mark invented new incidents usually argue from linguistic data. If through examination we can isolate Markan words, idiom and motifs and if we find these occurring in incidents then ought we not to conclude that Mark has written those sections of the incidents in which they occur, and if there are considerable numbers of them within any particular paragraph ought we not to conclude that he has written the whole paragraph? Against too hasty a conclusion in this respect I want to argue two things: (1) the careful work of E.J. Pryke Redactional Style in the Markan Gospel /9 has shown that such Markan linguistic characteristics tend to cluster in the introductions to, and ends of, paragraphs rather than within the paragraphs themselves; there is in fact not so much within the incidents that we can attribute on purely linguistic grounds to Mark. (2) If you listen to someone retelling an anecdote which you and he have heard together from another person, then you will notice that when it is retold the person who retells it makes subtle changes of vocabulary and idiom, but the important lines of the anecdote will almost certainly remain verbally identical with the original account; it is only the less important parts that are retold in the language of the new storyteller. We should thus expect to find a certain amount of Markan linguistic characteristics within any incidents but this would not of itself be a sign that he created the incident. All storytellers partly recast stories as they tell them.

Every storyteller also when he retells a story shapes it to the particular situation in which he finds himself;

parts of it which were immediately explicable to an earlier audience have now to be paraphrased or explained; new sentences will be inserted to bring out the points which to the original audience were perfectly obvious; and if the anecdote follows on another anecdote which he has just told or an anecdote which someone else has told or is part of an argument or discussion about a particular theory, then the anecdote has to be adapted to fit into its context, being modified to suit what has gone before and may come after. This will also be true of the way Mark used his material. With the form-critics we assume that prior to his use of it most of it existed as separate pericopae; in joining it together he had to provide connecting links and adapt it internally so that the connections between one incident and another would be clear. He also had to relate the paragraphs to one another in such a way that they fitted into his total purpose. Some of them may already have been joined together in the preceding tradition, e.g., the parables of chapter 4 or the miracles of chapter 5; as Mark worked these in he would retain their existing connections but modify them so that they fitted his total purpose.

It is possible to join two incidents together merely by putting in 'and' between them; Mark seems to have done this on occasion, yet examination shows the connections to be much closer than that of simple addition. Even if it were only simple addition the person who adds one to another must have some reason why he puts them in the order he does and not in another. If pearls are being put on a string it is not merely a case of putting one after the other but of grading them according to variation of size and colour so that a pleasing pattern is produced.

Before Mark went to work most of the material lacked within itself a principle by which it could be ordered. The form-critics have argued, and, correctly, that the separate incidents circulated without geographical and temporal data. It mattered little to someone in Rome when or where Jesus spoke a particular logion or healed a particular sick person. Within themselves therefore the paragraphs contained no easy clue as to how they should be related. We have no idea when Jesus told the parable of the sower, nor had Mark; yet he had to place it in his Gospel.



Some kind of organisational principle was required. It is of course true that some of the material contains within itself evidence as to how it should be placed in the total study. The account of the empty tomb cannot be placed before the account of Jesus' death; the account of his baptism cannot be placed after his death. Most of the material however did not contain such coded information as to the place in which it should be put. Mark's great achievement was to take the material and to give it an order.

Yet if we say Mark gave an 'order' to the material we must not look for an over elaborate or very mysterious order. It is impossible to accept A.M. Farrer's number symbolism in relation to the miracles /11 or P. Carrington's view of the pericopae as ordered in accordance with the liturgical year /12 or Q. Quesnell's attempt to unravel the mysteries of the Gospel through the theme of 'bread'. /13 We cannot exclude however an element of spiritualisation or allegorisation. (Schreiber goes too far in this respect /14); Morton Smith describes Mark as 'folk-literature'; /15,16; anyone who has any acquaintance with ordinary not too well educated Christians knows that they 'spiritualise' the Gospel material very readily; there is no reason to doubt that in the first century 'spiritual' meaning would have been seen in the miracles or that Mark intended his readers to see such a meaning. /17

Instead of speaking of Mark as author or editor it is better to think of him in terms of an artist who creates a College. He takes existing fragments of material and by placing them in relation to one another he creates something which did not previously exist. So Mark created a new form, the gospel, out of the individual incidents which were known to his community. We must give him full credit for this even if we have great difficulty in detecting what was the principle which he used to organise the material. It must at any rate have been very closely related to his purpose, and to this we now turn.

Did Mark intend his book to be used within the church for the benefit of the community or outside it for apologetic or missionary purposes? Some /18 have contended that even if the Gospel was not directly written to be given to outsiders as a guide to Christianity yet it was intended for the instruction of Christians in their faith so that they should present it to those outside. It must be allowed at once that much of the material in its pre-written separated state may have been used by missionaries; this by no means implies that the complete gospel would be used in the same way.

The lessons Mark draws from the miracles relate to those who are already within the community; the feeding of the five thousand means the feeding of the community; the miracles on the lake indicate the saving presence of Jesus within the community. An outsider might have been attracted by the performance of the actual healing miracle by a Christian charismatic; he would not have been attracted in the same way by someone telling the story of one of Jesus' miracles. The passion story may have been used in the market-place to tell about the death and resurrection of Jesus but as it appears in Mark's gospel with its various additions, e.g., the account of the Last Supper, it is intended for church usage; non-Christians would not have been instructed in the meaning of the eucharist. While the Parable of the Sower might be used in active missionary work, its interpretation in 4.14-20 dealing with the temptations to which Christians are exposed and the need for them to stand firm in their faith is hardly relevant to missionary preaching. Of what help to the missionary would it be to tell outsiders that the family of Jesus had doubts about his mission (3.20f.)? His followers are presented in the Gospel in a most unfavourable light; they fail to understand his clear teaching; they reject the idea that he is to die, the centre of the Christian message according to the Gospel; when he is arrested they flee; one of them betrays him; another denies him. How would this attract outsiders to Jesus? Regular reference is made in the story to the Old Testament; outsiders would not appreciate its significance.



Secret instruction is given to the disciples; they are taken aside by Jesus who explains to them the truth of what has been said publicly; this is hardly the way to present him to those who do not belong to the faith. A large part of the gospel is taken up with instruction in discipleship, and much of this would be unusable in mission work; it is hardly necessary to explain to unbelievers the Christian rules about divorce or wealth. We conclude then that the gospel was written for believers to be used within the community.

The community however could be benefitted in different ways: (a) by being given more information about the life and times of Jesus; (b) by having false ideas to which it was subject corrected or by having made available to it a refutation of false ideas which were in danger of entering it; (c) by being given pastoral counsel through exhortation intended to deepen faith.

(a) The first of these views can be disposed of fairly easily; it was current in the nineteenth century when the Gospels were looked on as sources of information for the life of Jesus. The early church however was not interested to that extent in the historical Jesus as such. In any case almost all the information which the Gospel contains on the life of Jesus was already known to the community in the tradition which it possessed. The Gospel could therefore give little extra information, except by the order in which the material was arranged in it. If the material had been put together in such a way as to show the psychological development of Jesus in his mission or the building up of opposition to him so that his death was explained as historical necessity then we might look on it as a source of information. But the Gospel does not do these things. Moreover anything which points to theological tendencies within the Gospel militates against a view of it as primarily intended to provide historical information.

(b) The view that the gospel was written to counter heresy has become increasingly common within the past decade; those who hold it usually agree on the nature of the heresy: the presentation of Jesus as a 'divine man' (theios aner). /19

Either this was implicit in the tradition as known to Mark's community, or some belonging to the community or coming from outside it were interpreting the tradition in this way. He was thus being set alongside some of the great figures of the ancient world, e.g., Pythagoras, Moses, Apollonius of Tyana. Against any view setting out Jesus as a worker of miracles or an expounder of wisdom. Mark emphasises instead the place of the Cross, presenting a suffering christology rather than a christology of glory. It must be allowed at once that there is no reason why such a heresy may not have been current in the early church; down through the centuries men have sought to evade the radical nature of the crucified Jesus and have preferred to see him as the one who worked miracles or expounded wisdom. But that does not mean that that view threatened Mark's community as a formal heresy or that he would have written primarily against it.

The theory that Mark wrote to combat heresy is commonly held in conjunction with a belief that he used the disciples as examples of those who held the heresy. /20 Opinions of the adherents of this theory differ whether Mark actually regarded the historical twelve as holding the heresy or used the tradition about the twelve in such a way that the heresy was fathered on them; in either case Mark counters it by the way in which he presents Jesus as teaching them.

No one can deny that the disciples are regularly presented in a bad light, and that with special reference to the cross. At Caesarea Philippi after Peter had confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus prophesies that he, Jesus will suffer and die; Peter rebukes Jesus about the need for suffering and is in turn rebuked by Jesus (8.27-33). After the second prediction of the passion the disciples are discovered by Jesus as they follow him quarrelling as to which of them is the greatest (9.30-37); they cannot understand that the cross implies the denial of any claim to greatness. After the third prediction of the passion James and John come to Jesus seeking the best places in the Kingdom and are rebuked by Jesus; the Christian must present his service as that of a slave if he is to go the way of the cross (10.32-45). When



the Crucifixion itself comes the disciples forsake Jesus and he is left alone. They have failed to understand the purpose of God in the dying of Jesus. So far so good, the disciples are in effect rejecting a suffering christology; but they also reject a christology, for they are presented as failing to understand the miracles and the parables. In a summarising passage written by Mark himself (8.14-21) they are in a ship; Jesus enquires about food for the voyage and it is made clear that they have not understood his miraculous powers in the provision of food when he fed five thousand and four thousand. At 6.52 it is said that their hearts are hardened so that they did not understand the miracle of the loaves. Twice they are taken apart by Jesus to receive special instruction in the meaning of the parables, indicating that when they first hear them they do not understand them (4.11f; 7.17); on the second of these occasions the disciples enquire from Jesus the meaning of the parable and he asks them 'Then are you also without understanding?' (7.18). It is impossible on the one hand to stress the blindness of the disciples in respect of the cross and argue that they represent a christology which emphasises the miracles and wisdom of Jesus when at the same time they do not understand the miracles or his teaching.

More generally, in narrative literature it is common for readers to identify themselves with characters within the story. If the readers of Mark's Gospel are those within his own community they will identify themselves, not with the enemies of Jesus or even with the crowd, but with the disciples, or with Jesus himself. It is inevitable they should do the last, yet they cannot do this completely for as Mark presents Jesus he stands in a unique category; this can be seen from the ransom saying (10.45); the preceding verses emphasise the need for all followers of Jesus to behave as servants or slaves, and then comes the reason 'For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give life as ransom for many'. The readers can serve God as Jesus did by not pushing themselves forward but they cannot give their lives as a ransom for others as he did; they are not even encouraged to attempt it. /21 In fact there is thus little in Mark driving the

readers to identify with Jesus. This then leaves the disciples as the most likely group with which the readers would identify. /22 The disciples are shown to be blind, stupid and weak but will not Mark's readers often have been this themselves? It would be natural for them to identify with the disciples. Everyone, that is all the Christians in Rome, however, knew that the disciples did not remain stupid, blind and weak but after the resurrection went the way of Jesus and were the first missionaries of the church, some of them suffering death as he did. The Gospel ends with the instruction to the women to tell the disciples that Jesus is risen (16.7); in this lies the promise of their forgiveness. The readers may take comfort from the same; if like the disciples they fail then like the disciples the encouraging message of the resurrection is for them, and it is for their sins that Jesus has given himself a ransom. Finally if the disciples were being rejected or if they were depicted as heretics we would expect that in their place there would be set up some other good group with which the readers could identify. There is no such other good group.

If we no longer assume that the disciples are to be explicitly associated with the heresy which is being attacked it still could be argued that Mark does set forth a suffering christology over against a 'divine man' christology. It is doubtful if the 'divine man' concept was sufficiently clearly formulated at this time in the ancient world for it to be regarded as a particular view which could be proposed or argued against. /23 We cannot however deny, as we have already indicated, that there has been a consistent tendency within Christianity to present Jesus as a miracle worker rather than as a sufferer. We must therefore examine whether the gospel is written against that general tendency.

First and foremost we must note that Jesus is not attacked as miracle worker in the gospel. The miracles are given a positive significance. /24 As we have already seen the disciples are blamed for not understanding them. The two healings of blind men are used



to indicate that God through Jesus was bringing understanding and enlightenment to the lives of the disciples (8.22-26; 10.46-52). The two feeding miracles are used to show that Jesus as the shepherd feeds the community (6.34). By the play on the double significance of the word "sozein" as meaning both 'to heal' and 'to save' it is indicated that the one who heals is also the one who saves (5.23, 28, 34; 6.56; 10.52). If Mark was attacking a view of Jesus as miracle worker he could hardly use the miracles in this way. The miracles have thus a positive place within the gospel.

Finally it must be queried if Mark provides a christology only of a suffering Messiah. He does not ignore the resurrection: Jesus is alive in the community. Some day, perhaps soon, he will return to redeem those who are his. Suffering is only a portion of the total picture of Jesus; triumph may lie through suffering but triumph is not excluded. Because Jesus has triumphed the disciples may likewise triumph over the evils which afflict them, over temptation, persecution, suffering. Their role is not only one in which they suffer, but also a role in which they are forgiven and may be finally victorious. /25

(c) Against these views I would argue that the main purpose of the Gospel is pastoral. A good pastor, however, does many things for his people. He gives them information, corrects their errors, encourages them to endure, brings them to a deeper understanding of their faith. Attention may be drawn to two aims which Mark as pastor hoped to achieve when he wrote his Gospel: he set out Jesus as (1) the helper of his people; (2) the one who challenges them to a new way of life.

(1) A little has already been said about the way in which Mark uses the miracles positively. /26 There is no need to go over this again but we look at one type of miracle not previously mentioned, the exorcism. These were clearly important for Mark and his readers for not only does he include a number of accounts but he also says that the twelve when they were sent out by Jesus were given power to exorcise and in one of his summaries (3.11-12) he specifically draws

attention to the way in which Jesus cast out many unclean spirits. The last account of an exorcism is the story of the boy who was brought to the disciples by the father; Jesus is absent and the disciples fail to heal the boy; Jesus returns and heals him. Afterwards when Jesus is alone with his disciples he says to them 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.' (9.28-29) Belief in demonic possession was widespread in the ancient world; Mark's readers must have feared the power of demons as active both in themselves and in those outside the church and dreaded all too possible encounters with them. Now they learn that if the twelve failed it was because they had not prayed. If then God's power is allowed to operate through themselves by prayer they will be able to defeat the demons as Jesus did. The examples of the exorcisms carried out by Jesus reinforce this message. Jesus is still alive and among them, and his power is operative against evil; let them be assured that they have not been left to themselves and that they can overcome all supernatural evil.

Jesus also helps them because he is the one who presents them with teaching which enables them to understand the purposes of God. In redactional passages Mark emphasises the teaching of Jesus. He may not give as much of the actual teaching as do Matthew and Luke through their use of Q yet he gives a considerable amount and what he does give is not so much ethical instruction as instruction about God's rule among men; he reproduces Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God and the place of Jesus, and about what God demands from men in obedience if they are to follow Jesus. Without entering into the content of the teaching it is sufficient to emphasise that if there is to be growth in the Christian life then teaching which gives understanding of God is necessary. Mark then presents Jesus as the one who helps by his teaching.

It could be said that in the miracles and in the teaching Jesus is alive and active; if in those ways he helps men as the risen one he is also their helper through his death. Again without entering into this in

detail it is sufficient to point to two features: (i) Jesus is the one through whom forgiveness of sins comes. Before he heals the man who has been let down through the roof at his feet in the crowded house he promises him forgiveness; his life is offered as a ransom for many; his blood is poured out for many. Through Jesus there is redemption from sin, and this takes place through his death; (ii) It is because of his death that the Gentiles are within the church. The parable of the vineyard in which the absentee landlord sends back messengers for his produce is used to bring this out; the messengers are ill-treated in various ways or killed; then the landlord sends his own son who is himself killed. In consequence the landlord returns and takes the vineyard from those who are now his enemies and gives it to others. God's people are no longer the Jews by birth but all those who are faithful to Jesus and do not find him a stone of stumbling; that means there are Gentiles within the church. The cleansing of the Temple carries the same lesson; Jesus cleared the court of the Gentiles of those who bought and proclaimed the temple to be a house of prayer for all nations; in early Christian symbolism the temple denoted the church; thus the Gentiles are given an equal position in God's church with the Jews. As Jesus died the veil of the temple was rent asunder, signifying that the special position of the Jews with their altar through which alone God could be approached was now done away; the Gentiles have access to God through Jesus.

(2) It is a constant theme in both the Old and New Testaments that where God has acted he looks for man to respond. If therefore Mark presents Jesus as the one who helps the community he will as a good pastor also present him as the one who challenges the community. The challenge comes to disciples simultaneously with their call. When Jesus went along the lakeside and saw Peter and Andrew mending their nets he called them to come after him for he would make them fishers of men. If they are to be with Jesus then they must work for him.

Jesus' challenge appears most sharply in the



words of 8.34 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'. The summons to take up the cross must at the beginning have been understood literally; be prepared to accept martyrdom as Jesus did. In the course of time it has become purely metaphorical indicating the need to bear little troubles patiently. Although Mark's readers faced the prospect of persecution they cannot have taken the words purely literally for many of them did not end on crosses; even if they were martyred they died in other ways; some among them will already have died in their beds. The phrase speaks of dying; dying was a theme of early church teaching; Paul said 'I die daily'. To take up the cross then brings us into the area of putting the self to death. This is the same area we enter when we consider what 'Deny oneself' means. It does not mean, as it is often taken to mean, that the follower of Jesus should deny certain pleasures to himself. A criminal may deny himself pleasure in order to achieve his purpose; an executive may deny himself hours of recreation in order to build up his position within his company; neither are necessarily doing anything good in denying things to themselves. But what Jesus says is not that men should deny things to themselves but that they should deny themselves; it is the self which has to be denied. It is a natural impulse of men to affirm themselves, to develop themselves, to express themselves; the text says instead that they have to deny themselves. Whatever is the very centre of being, the core of life, must be denied or put to death. To take up the cross means to die in the innermost part of one's being.

The challenge of Jesus is, of course, developed throughout the great central section, from the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi to the declaration of Jesus that he will give his life a ransom for many (8.27-10.45). In the light of Jesus' onward march to the cross the self-interest and self-glorification of the disciples is shown up; the cross challenges them to serve one another, not to glorify themselves.

Within the total pastoral purpose of the book the

disciples are important as examples to the community. As Jesus helps, challenges and restores them so Mark's community may equally be helped, challenged and restored. The latter, restoration, is particularly important. Not only is the church faced by persecution but, as the development of the parable of the sower shows, there are constant temptations of other kinds which would turn Christians away from the path of Jesus; men may be tempted by riches and the desire for possessions, security, ease, and so fail. The disciples are shown to have failed regularly. But everyone in Mark's community knew that after the resurrection they were restored. Peter's repentance after his denial of Jesus is shown in the final clause to the story which is almost certainly due to Mark 'He broke down and wept'. Only recently the Roman Christians have themselves seen him die for his Lord. The message given to the woman at the cross is to tell Peter and the disciples that Jesus is risen. This is still the message for Mark's community. They will have many failures; as a pastor he wants them to know that God through Jesus restores them and though they stumble in following the way of the cross yet they can with courage go ahead knowing that they are not abandoned by God. Thus the way in which Mark uses the disciples fits in with his total pastoral purpose.

### III

What was the occasion of the writing of the Gospel? What brought it into being? It was neither the commercialist novelist's desire for royalties, nor the self-expression of the poet. Its production could have been stimulated either by some event or movement outside the community or by something happening within the community. We examine briefly a few of the suggested possibilities, beginning with those which depend on an outside cause.

(a) Marxsen /27 has linked the writing of the Gospel to the siege of Jerusalem 66-70 AD and the oracle which told the Christian community to leave Jerusalem and go to Pella. The end was due soon when Jesus would

return to meet his faithful ones in Galilee. Galilee is featured throughout the Gospel and it is at Galilee that the disciples are told that they will see the risen Lord (14.28; 16.7). Whatever that saying of Jesus originally meant, Marxsen understands it in Mark as a reference to the return of Christ.

It is impossible to deny the apocalyptic interest of Mark and the community's expectation that the Lord would return soon, but there are also in Mark signs of a longer future in the parables of growth; the interpretation of the parable of the sower suggests a continued period of existence for the church. We must doubt Marxsen's attempt to tie the Gospel to physical Galilee; at the points where he takes it in that way its use may be symbolic as he allows it in many of its other occurrences. Why in any case should the idea of an exodus from Jerusalem lead to the writing of a Gospel? An apocalyptic tract would be more appropriate. /28 Galilee itself seems unlikely to be the centre from which or for which the Gospel was written for in Galilee there would have been no need to translate into Greek the Aramaisms which appear in it; even if the Christian community in Galilee used Greek as their first language they would still have understood Aramaic.

(b) Brandon also relates the writing of the Gospel to the fall of Jerusalem but more directly to the effect of the Jewish war upon the Christians, not in Palestine, but in Rome. /29 By writing the Gospel, and in particular by the way in which he frames the account of the passion, Mark seeks to free the Romans from the blame for the death of Jesus hoping that the Christians will not then suffer as the Jews are suffering in and through the siege of Jerusalem. In advancing this view Brandon seeks to separate the Christians from all trace of contact with the early church in Palestine; thus Jesus' family is presented as hostile towards him (3.20-21, 31-5); Nazareth, his home village, rejects him (6.1-6); the original disciples misunderstand his message. The reference in Ch. 13 to the abomination of desolation is a reference to the fall of the Temple.

We must admit that Mark does lay more blame on



the Jews and less on the Romans than was perhaps historically the case, /30 but in the Gospel it is the Jewish leaders who are blamed and not the people as such; that kind of emphasis might not free the Christians from Roman attacks. We have already suggested that the failure of the disciples was intended by Mark for quite another purpose: as representatives of Mark's Christian community its members are instructed through their failure. The hostility of the family of Jesus towards him must have been reproduced many times in the Roman-Christian community; it was consoling to Roman Christians to know that their Lord had suffered the same hostility as they did from their own families. /31 If we were to accept Brandon's point of view Mark would have needed to make the whole thing much clearer.

(c) We turn now to internal causes which may have produced the Gospel. Clearly those who hold that it was written to counter heretical tendencies penetrating the church would take these heresies to be the occasion of the Gospel. We have already discussed and dismissed this view of the Gospel.

(d) The traditional answer to our question has been that eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus were dying, in particular Peter had been martyred, and that the church leaders came to Mark whom they knew to have been a companion of Peter and to have himself been brought up in Jerusalem and suggested to him that he should get down in writing as much as he remembered of what Peter and others had taught. This view is supported externally by the testimony of Papias that Mark was Peter's interpreter, /32 and internally by: (i) the belittlement of Peter, which it is suggested could only have come from himself; (ii) the vividness of the narrative at many points suggesting that the source of the story was an eye-witness; (iii) the known presence and death of Peter in Rome where the Gospel was written.

We cannot deny that eye-witnesses would have been dying out in this period; if the Gospel was written around 70 AD vital statistics would imply that very few of those who knew Jesus would be alive then. Equally we cannot deny that Peter would have had some influence

upon the Gospel. If it was written in Rome after he had been there. But Peter did not bring the Jesus-tradition to Rome; long before he reached Rome the stories of Jesus were known there. Peter could have modified some of the existing stories and provided some new stories, in particular, stories about himself which would serve as an example to early Christians. So far as vividness goes anyone who has heard a preacher retelling stories from scripture will know how under a skilful hand they become ever more vivid; vividness is not the infallible sign of an eye-witness. Lastly, the interpretation of what Papias means is difficult, even supposing that his testimony is correct.

To sum up. If we allow that Mark was writing as a pastor then it is difficult perhaps to identify a particular situation to which the Gospel was a response. There were probably a number of contributory factors. Among these we would include pressures coming from the Jewish war and the fall or imminent fall of Jerusalem, the possible sudden and early return of Jesus (at least it was believed to be so by Mark and his readers), the influence of Peter upon the Gospel stories in Rome and his death, and, a factor not yet mentioned, the incidence of persecution in Rome; the church had fairly recently passed through a period of extreme trial under Nero. These, together with other factors unknown to us, will have worked to lead Mark to write the Gospel.

### Notes

1. Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte (Göttingen, 1956; ET Nashville, 1969).
2. Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (Göttingen, 1901; ET Cambridge, 1971).
3. To a lesser degree this is true also of J. Wellhausen's Das Evangelium Marci (Berlin, 1903); unfortunately this has never been translated into English.
4. Von Reimarus zu Wrede (Tübingen, 1906; ET The Quest

- of the Historical Jesus); Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu (Tübingen; 1901; ET The Mystery of the Kingdom of God).
5. Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes (Göttingen, 1892; ET Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, London, 1971).
6. The History of the Synoptic Tradition (ET; Oxford, 1963) p.350
7. Cf. Best, 'Mark's Preservation of the Material' in M.Sabbe, L'Evangile selon Marc: Tradition et Rédaction (Leuven, 1974), pp 21-34.
8. E.g. N. Perrin, The Resurrection Narratives (London, 1977) pp.24-29
9. Cambridge, 1978 (S.N.T.S., Monograph Series 33)
10. Papias, (cf. Eusebius, E.H., iii, 39) says that Mark did not set down his account 'in order' and presumably refers to chronological order.
11. A Study in Mark (London, 1951)
12. The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the Markan Gospel (Cambridge, 1952)
13. The Mind of Mark (Anal. Bib. 38; Rome 1969).
14. J. Schreiber, Theologie des Vertrauens, Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums (Hamburg, 1967).
15. 'Comments on Taylor's Commentary on Mark', HTR 48 (1955) 21-64 at p.38 n.23
16. Cf. H. Räsänen, Das "Messiasgeheimnis" im Markusevangelium (Helsinki, 1976), pp.14ff. See now B.H.M.G.M. Standaert, L'Evangile selon Marc: Composition et Genre littéraire (Brugge, 1978) for discussion and criticism.
17. Cf. Best, 'The Miracles in Mark', Review and Expositor.
18. E.G., A.E.J. Rawlinson, St. Mark (London, 1942), p.xxii; C.F.D. Moule, 'The Intention of the Evangelists', in New Testament Essays (In Memory of T.W. Manson, ed. A.J.B. Higgins; Manchester, 1959) pp.165-179



19. T.J.Weeden, Mark: Traditions in Conflict (Philadelphia, 1971); J.Schreiber, 'Die Christologie des Markusevangeliums: Beobachtungen zur Theologie und Komposition des zweiten Evangeliums', ZTK 58 (1961) 154-83; D.Georgi, Die Gegner des Paulus im 2 Korintherbrief (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1964) pp.282ff; N.Perrin, 'The Christology of Mark: A Study in Methodology', J.Rel. 51 (1971) 173-187.
20. E.g., J.B.Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', JBL 80 (1961) 261-8; T.J.Weeden, op.cit.
21. In fact the imitation of Jesus is not as clear a theme in Mark as it is in Luke.
22. Cf. Best, 'The Role of the disciples in Mark', NTS 23 (1976/7) 377-40]; R.C.Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role', J.Rel. 57 (1977) 386-405.
23. Cf. O.Betz, 'The Concept of the So-called "Divine Man" in Mark's Christology', in Studies in New Testament and Early Christianity (in honour of A.P.Wikgren, ed. D. E.Aune; Suppl.NT.23; Leiden, 1972) pp.229-240; C.R. Holladay, Theios aner in Hellenistic-Judaism (Missoula, 1977); D.L.Tiede The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker (Missoula, 1972).
24. Cf. Best, as in n.17; G.Theissen, Urchristliche Wundergeschichten (Gütersloh, 1974)
25. A.B.Kolenkow, 'Healing Controversy as a Tie between Miracle and Passion Material for a Proto-Gospel' JBL 95 (1976) 623-38, has argued from a comparison of John and Mark that there was a pre-existing connection between the healing stories and the passion; if this pre-Markan pattern existed then the miracles were also used positively within it.
26. For more detail cf. Best<sup>1</sup> as in n. 17.
27. Op.cit., pp.66ff. 112ff (ET pp.102ff., 166ff.)
28. Cf. R.P.Martin, Mark-Evangelist and Historian, pp70-5 for further criticisms of Marxsen's view.
29. S.G.F.Brandon, The Fall of Jerusalem and the

30. The tendency to excuse the Romans increased as time went by.

31. J. Lambrecht, 'The Relatives of Jesus in Mark' NT 16(1974) 241-258. Cf Best, 'Mark III 20, 21, 31-35' NTS 22(1975-6) 309-319

St Paul and the Anger of God

K.N.E.Newell

Since the publication of his commentary on Romans in 1932, C.H.Dodd has won considerable support for his treatment of the apostle's concept of the anger of God. The most notable contribution has come from Dr A.T.Hanson. In his book 'The Wrath of the Lamb' (1957) he traces the idea of 'impersonal wrath' within the whole biblical tradition and concludes that Dodd's observations are correct. The Christian public have been acquainted with the issues through the 'Daily Bible Study' commentaries of William Barclay who acknowledges himself indebted to Dodd's insights.

Dodd holds that when Paul uses 'orgē theou' (wrath of God) he is not describing 'a certain feeling or attitude of God towards us, but some process or effect in the realm of objective facts.' /1 He examines the idea of 'the angry God' from its roots in primitive religion, through the OT and the teaching of Jesus, into the writings of Paul. He concludes that there has always been something 'impersonal' about it from the beginning. Thus, "in the long run we cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest ideals of personality and yet attribute to him the irrational passion of anger." /2 Paul and Jesus, he believes, have abandoned the archaic concept of the angry God for the view that his love and mercy are all-embracing. Can Paul's use of 'orgē' sustain this interpretation? Any answer must first examine the major sources of his thinking, mainly the OT, Judaism and the teaching of Jesus.

### 1. The OT and the anger of the Lord

The two major convictions upon which OT theology is founded are the reality of God and the reality of the universe over which he reigns (Ps.10.16). Within history he has made himself known to Israel; the Sinai Covenant is his gift to her as well as his demand for her fidelity. Yahweh's covenant is a serious matter, a matter of 'blessing and cursing' (Deut.11.26), a matter of life and death.



Yahweh's revelation in the Sinai reflects an Israelite cultic confession: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love... but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34.6-7). All such formulae (Neh. 9.17, 31; Jer. 32.18) underline the goodness and severity of Yahweh. His anger is inherent in his character as his 'curse' is inherent in the covenant regulations. It flows from his holiness (Lev. 10.1-7) and righteousness (Ps. 97.2-3). Other terms such as 'avenge', 'judge', and 'destroy' also express aspects of his wrath.

The writers of the OT were deeply impressed by Yahweh's anger as their abundant references to it testify. The most usual noun is 'ap' and its most frequent synonym HEmah. Moreover eighty per cent of the 'anger' references relate to Yahweh, and twenty per cent to human anger. When used of God the noun form is overwhelmingly preferred to the verbal.

What factors provoke the anger of the Lord? The answer is simply wilful and persistent sin. Israel falls under wrath for despising the covenant (Josh. 23.16); the nations do so for threatening God's people, undermining her loyalty to the covenant (Ex. 23.23-4), and breaking the basic moral laws of humanity by excessive cruelty (Amos 1.11). The Flood (Gen. 6-8) and the tower of Babel (Gen. 10) demonstrate Yahweh's spiritual and moral concern for the whole world.

How does Yahweh's anger touch human existence? Though not all misfortune is the result of man's sin or God's wrath, yet wrath can be expressed in cosmic disturbances (famine, earthquakes, plagues et al.), political disasters (military defeat, collapse of national life), and legal retribution in which the covenantal 'curses' often determine the content of justice (Deut. 27-28).

Can Yahweh's anger be averted? The ritual of the sacrificial system with its expiatory offerings (eg burnt-offering, sin-offering, guilt-offering, culminating in the annual day of atonement, provided 'covering' for Israel's sin, removal of the threat of wrath, and renewal of reconciliation with Yahweh. Essential also was repentance (Jer. 3.12), a return to covenantal obedience.

Sometimes the prayers of the righteous (Ex 32.32), and the punishment of offenders who bring wrath on the community (Num 25.1-13), can turn away wrath. In Deutero-Isaiah's "suffering servant" appears one who bears the sin of Israel, the wrath of God and thus achieves redemption for his people (Is 53.1-12). Frequently nothing can stop Yahweh's anger running its terrible course.

In the OT therefore the anger of the Lord is part of his covenantal nature, and is repeatedly demonstrated in his relationship with Israel and the nations.

## 2. Judaism and the anger of the Lord

The fall of Jerusalem (587BC) and the exile cast their shadow over the religion of the inter-testamental period; the day of Yahweh's wrath had finally come for Israel (Esdras 1.49-52). With the return of the exiles (538BC) the essential features of Judaism begin to emerge: the sole reality of Yahweh, the importance of the law, Israel's strong sense of election. During the Seleucid period apocalyptic convictions appear as hope in the renewal of the Davidic state recedes and faith in the supernatural kingdom of God advances.

The idea of God undergoes some changes. His transcendence is emphasised as surrogate titles such as "the Most High God" and the "King of Heaven" begin to replace the sacred name 'Yahweh'. There is concern for a 'pure' concept of God, as in the LXX, devoid of unworthy anthropomorphisms. Surprisingly anger is not one of these for "the LXX translators have reproduced correctly the original Hebrew in the OT passages dealing with wrath."

/3 Again, the concept of Yahweh as the coming Judge, "with whom are mercy and wrath" (Sir.5.6) is painted in even darker colours than in the OT.

The Torah as divine revelation written and oral becomes the sole standard of religion, and in keeping the Torah alone is there hope of salvation at the last judgment. Occasionally there is optimism that some might achieve righteousness with God by keeping the Torah but generally a gloomier evaluation prevails.

Whether it be in the spiritual, moral, civil or cultic spheres, the Torah defines what sin is. Sin is, moreover, linked firmly with the individual as the idea of collective responsibility weakens. /4 Since all men have sinned, all live under the cloud of wrath, unless that cloud is removed by a radical return to the Lord (2 Esdras 8.34-35).

Judaism is pervaded by an acute sense of sin and a corresponding concern for expiation. Cultic rituals and repentance remain central, but the human role in achieving atonement is stressed. Good works such as almsgiving (Sir.3.31), sufferings borne as divine chastisements, and death itself are given expiatory power. The sufferings of the righteous and the nation's martyrs can be expiatory and propitiatory (2 Macc.7.37-38).

The day of judgment dominates eschatology as "the great event towards which the whole universe is moving, and which will vindicate once and for all God's righteous purpose for men and all creation." /5 Judgment will be universal, fair and irrevocable. Condemnation brings the terrible prospect of Gehenna (Hell) where the souls of the dead are tormented after the great assize. Gehenna constitutes the most terrifying metaphor in which the anger of the Lord is clothed.

The OT view of the wrath of God flows naturally into Judaism and broadens out in certain directions which we have noted above. Nevertheless it remains a frightening prospect.

### 3. Jesus and the anger of God.

Hardly a mention is made in the teaching of Jesus, apart from some parables (Mt 18.34; 22.7) of the specific concept of the anger of God. Does this mean, as Dodd suggests that Jesus had abandoned the whole idea? If the words are rare, is the concept absent? A brief survey of the teaching of Jesus would suggest the opposite.

The major theme in Jesus' message is the reign of God. The coming of the kingdom in his life and ministry heralds the beginning of the end for the forces of anti-God; it also spells danger for unholy man. What Jesus presents



is not peaceful idyll; for some it brings hope of salvation, for others dread of judgment (Mk 8.38; Mt 25.12, 26-30). Though Jesus bestows the messianic gift of forgiveness (Mk 2.5; Lk 7.47), there is a sin for which there is no pardon (Mt 12.32f and pars), that is, recognising the Spirit-filled mission of Jesus, yet defying, resisting and cursing it. Far worse than physical death awaits those who reject the kingdom (Mk 8.34f). The good news of the kingdom is a gift of grace as well as a demand for conversion and a warning of impending judgment.

If we rarely hear 'anger' on the lips of Jesus, it is also striking how rarely anger is attributed to him by the synoptic writers. He looks around at the Pharisees 'with anger' (Mk 3.5) and is 'angry' (some mss have 'moved with compassion') at the suffering of the leper (Mk 1.41); he is 'indignant' that his disciples should turn away children from him (aganakteo Mk 10.14). Here is the anger of the whole Christ, God and Man. /6 Upon his lips however we hear the prophetic 'woes' pronounced upon Israel's leaders (Lk 11.37-54; Mt 23). He foretells the doom of Jerusalem, 'the centre of disobedience', where the blood of the Son of God will be spilled (Mk 13). Its destruction will be a day of wrath (Lk 21. 23- only here does Jesus use 'wrath' outside a parabolic context)

Does Jesus see his death on the Cross as bound up with divine wrath? At his baptism he was conscious of being the messianic Son of God and servant of Yahweh (Mk 1.11; Ps. 2.7; Isa 42.1). Later he presents his death in terms which recall the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (Mk 10.45). His self-offering is sacrificial, vicarious and redemptive; it inaugurates the new covenant (Mk 14. 24) in which sin is covered; but is there any divine wrath to be removed? Several things would suggest there is: he must drink the cup of suffering (Mk 14.36 - in OT often the 'cup' is a synonym for 'wrath'), /7 enduring the divine smiting which is a wrath-bearing experience ('smitten by God'- Isa 53.4; cf also 53.10; with Mk 14.27 cf Zech 13.7), and be abandoned by God, an experience which calls forth the cry of dereliction (Mk 15.34; in the OT the worst of all fates was to be 'forsaken' by

God. " & Take together these references suggest that the Cross of Christ is the visible, historical manifestation of the wrath of God. " /9

Although the kingdom is present in Jesus, he often speaks of its future consummation. (Mk 14.25; Lk 11.2). Its coming means that there is joy in the prospect of salvation but danger in the prospect of judgment. A man's destiny will be decided by his response to Jesus ( Mk 10. 39; Lk 17.33); all self-achieved merits are worthless ( Lk 17.7-10). "No one in the world of men comes to his end without his fate being decided by the person of Christ." /10 It is the danger of receiving the sentence of condemnation that gives the message of Jesus its seriousness.

The idea of divine wrath surfaces in the teaching of Jesus in the imagery of Gehenna. It is the outcome of condemnation pronounced at the Judgment. Jesus certainly believed in Gehenna as deeply as he believed in eternal life (Mk 9.43,45,47 etc). For him 'the judgment of Gehenna is a judgment of wrath'. /11 There is no other possibility for those who reject God's kingdom.

In the light of this, it is difficult to maintain that Jesus discarded the concept of the wrath of God. In the face of evil it was a terrible reality.

#### 4. Paul and the anger of God.

Since Dodd's argument scans the whole biblical tradition, it has been necessary to glance at the anger of God in the OT., Judaism and the teaching of Jesus. Wrath has been seen to be inherent in the character of the God of the covenant and to determine the 'judgment' aspect of his relations with Israel and the world. It cannot be concluded that for Jesus 'anger as an attitude of God to men disappears, and his love and mercy become all-embracing.' /12 But there is evidence that Paul has discarded this 'archaic' concept? Dodd believes there is:-

(i) Paul speaks quite freely about God 'loving' man, and 'the love' of God, of God 'being gracious' to men and 'the grace' of God, but he never makes God the subject

of the verb 'to be angry', because Paul was aware that 'anger' does not befit the character of a loving and gracious God. (ii) When Paul uses the noun 'wrath' he does so in an 'impersonal' way. Of the 16 occasions when it is used, 13 appear in the absolute form ('wrath', 'the wrath'), disassociated from God. Only on three occasions does Paul speak of 'the wrath of God'. Paul prefers the 'impersonal' form because he understands wrath as an impersonal process of cause and effect in a moral universe, "not a certain feeling of God toward us." /13 (iii) To Dodd's case, Dr Hanson adds another factor. There is a "tradition of impersonal wrath" in the OT and Judaism which is the forerunner of Paul's usage. He affirms that "the significance of the treatment of the divine wrath in the Chronicler's work must not be underrated. We need look no further for the origin of Paul's doctrine of the wrath of God." /14

How strong then is the linguistic case presented here? We will look at the arguments in turn:

(i) Dodd is correct in saying that Paul never uses God as subject of the verb 'to be angry'. This is particularly noticeable in Romans where the verb occurs on ten occasions. The appearances of 'wrath' (noun) in Ephesians(2), Colossians(1) and 1 Thessalonians(3) do not provide sufficient linguistic data to allow an adequate comparison with the verbal form to be made. Nevertheless why does Paul not use God as the subject to the verb 'be angry' in Romans? Dodd's explanation is not the only possibility. A linguistic solution to this linguistic phenomenon is possible. Already we have noticed how in the OT nouns for 'wrath' appear about fifteen times more frequently than the verbs. Since Paul was steeped in the law and the prophets, it is not unlikely that his theological terminology is conditioned linguistically by that source. The verb/noun relationship in the OT is in the ratio of about one to fifteen; in Romans it is in the ratio none to ten. Furthermore in Romans Paul can make God the subject of a verb which has 'wrath' as an object,



thus associating God with wrath eg 'what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us?' (Romans 3.5; cf 9.22). Again there is no reluctance on Paul's part in making God the subject of expressions that can be seen to be parallel to the verb 'be angry' eg the solemn repetition of "God gave them up" (Romans 1.24,26,28). When Paul says "leave it to the wrath of God" (RSV of Romans 12.19), this may appear impersonal but it is closely linked up with and serves to refer to the very personal quotation "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Here Paul quotes from Deut.32.35 and reveals one source for his understanding of the wrath of God in the OT. If Paul then does not use the verb 'to be angry' of God, he comes as close to it as possible. A linguistic rather than a theological explanation would seem to be in order, though both are not necessarily inseparable.

(ii) Dodd's statement that "he(Paul) constantly uses 'wrath', or 'the wrath' in a curiously impersonal way" needs to be qualified. It is true that on thirteen out of sixteen occurrences Paul does not link 'wrath' with God but what about the other three occurrences? Can these be discounted? One of them is basic to his closely articulated argument in Romans 1.18ff 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men'. Cf also Ephesians 5.6; Colossians 3.6.

(b) In Romans 9.22 we have the sentence 'What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction....' The phrases 'show his wrath' and 'make known his power' are clearly the repetition, characteristic of preaching. Is there any good reason why both should not be seen as personal expressions of God's activity? Especially when God is the subject of 'show' and 'make known'?

(c) Again Paul sets the phrase 'vessels of wrath' over against 'vessels of mercy' (Romans 9.22,23). It is surely merely tendentious to make one of these impersonal and the other personal viz God can be linked with being merciful but not wrath? The two terms 'mercy and

wrath are constantly linked in Jewish writing eg. 'with him are mercy and wrath' (Sirach 5.6 et alii)

(d) We have already noted the absolute 'wrath' in the phrase 'give place to wrath' linked up with the very personal 'Vengeance is mine.....' (Romans 12.19)

(e) How far is it possible to make distinctions in parallel terminology eg. 'The wrath of God is coming' (Colossians 3.6) and 'Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come'? It would be natural to treat them as varied expressions of the same phenomenon. Can we separate the words 'the day of wrath' from the words 'of God' in the sentence 'the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God'? The alternative and repetitive phrases are surely to be equated.

Despite therefore the unusual way in which Paul speaks of God's anger it is doubtful whether he deliberately avoided applying it to the personal activity of God. The evaluation of Stählin seems apt: 'It can easily be demonstrated that in none of the NT passages is wrath a rigid principle acting independently of God, but that it stands everywhere in the closest possible connection with him and in fact with the God whose personal reaction it is.' /15

(iii) Does the Chronicler's 'tradition of impersonal wrath' provide the origin for Paul's doctrine of the wrath of God? If this could be proved, it would be important. On five occasions the Chronicler does use 'wrath' in an absolute manner eg., 'Therefore wrath came upon him' (2 Chron. 32.25; cf also 19.10; 24.18; 28.13; 1 Chron. 27.24) This however is only one side of the picture.<sup>(a)</sup> On fourteen occasions he uses 'wrath' in personal association with God eg., 'the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah..' (1 Chron 13.10; cf 2 Chron 6:36; 12.7,12; 19.2 et alii) (b) The phrases 'wrath' and 'wrath of the Lord' are seen to be interchangeable eg., 'Therefore wrath came upon him.. so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them'.

(c) Again we may note the way in which the source of the 'absolute' wrath is explained i.e. in personal terms: 'Wrath has gone out against you from the Lord.' (2 Chron 19.2) (d) The Chronicler can make

Yahweh subject of the verb 'to be angry' ( 2 Chron 6.36). If therefore the writer manifests a 'tendency', it is clearly in the direction of the traditional Hebrew understanding of 'wrath' as the personal reaction of Yahweh against evil. It is surely from the same source that Paul drew his 'doctrine' of wrath. Perhaps it could be suggested that the Chronicler reveals the 'origin' of Paul's 'terminology' for wrath, and this because the tendency to speak of God in Judaism by the use of surrogates included aspects of God's nature spoken of in abstract terms; thus 'wrath' may be the result of the process illustrated in the rise of absolute terms like 'The Word', 'the glory', 'Wisdom' i.e. avoiding the use of the divine name.

How then does Paul understand the nature of God's wrath? To the end of his life the apostle remained proud of his Jewish heritage ( Phil 3.4-6), and from this source were derived his deepest convictions about God. For Paul, God is the '*rex tremendae maiestatis*', a Being of supreme moral excellence, the Righteous one, before whom all must bow in awe and reverence. He remains all this, even though he is demonstrated in the Gospel to be the God of all grace.

### The situation of the world prior to God's saving Intervention In Christ

In Romans chapter one and verse 18 until chapter three and verse 20, Paul outlines the hopeless condition of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, before the gospel came on the scene. The heathen world had plunged headlong into every kind of perversity, iniquity and idolatry. There are no extenuating circumstances that can be presented as an excuse for such a situation because God has made himself known to the world by an act of creation which is at the same time an act of self-revelation. Furthermore by the very way in which he has constituted human beings, he has written on their heart the basic moral and spiritual content of the Torah (Romans 2. 14-15 ). In surveying the pagan world Paul can see God's anger revealed through what is happening in it.



There are distinct signs that God is punishing sinners by 'handing them over' ( 1.24,26, 28) to further enslavement and degradation at the hands of the sins to which they have chosen to be obedient. They are now 'perishing' and are 'lost' even though they know nothing of salvation as it is in Christ. /16

Jews would have agreed with Paul's assessment of the pagan world, but even as they condemn heathenism they are pronouncing their own doom (2.1 to 3.20). Despite all their inestimable privileges, they are not heaping up merit with God but rather 'wrath', and this is because they remain impenitent and hard. The law in which the Jews glories pronounces its curse on his sinfulness and threatens God's dreaded wrath ( Galatians 3.10); it brings down God's anger on the man who knows the law but does not keep it. The world without Christ then stands guilty before God because of its sin. already it is experiencing a foretaste of God's anger; something even worse awaits it (Ephesians 2.4 ).

The way in which God sets the world right  
with himself.

Into this scene of universal hopelessness Christ has come to liberate mankind from the vicious circle of sin, death and divine wrath. Paul demonstrates that it is by the Cross that God puts the world right with himself, for it is the supreme revelation of God's saving righteousness. Men are now put right with God by his sheer grace, as it is expressed

"through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus  
whom God put forward as an expiation by his  
blood, to be received by faith"

(Romans chapter three, vss  
24,25)

Paul considers the Cross of Christ as the manifestation of God's love for sinners (Romans 5.8; 2 Cor.5.19 ). Here also the son of God bears all the sin of mankind (2 Cor 5.21) and, in doing so, takes upon himself for our benefit, the 'curse' of the law (Galatians 3.13), for

"in the curse of the law wrath and condemnation a ready press on man". /17

But what does Paul mean when he calls the sacrifice of Christ an 'hilasterion'? Can the word mean 'expiation' or 'propitiation'? In other words, is the death of Jesus to be viewed as removing the defilement of sin (expiation) or as putting away the divine wrath—which in itself implies the putting away of sin the essential cause of such wrath— or does it involve both? When Paul uses the term 'hilasterion' he is almost certainly thinking of the cultic setting of the day of Atonement in which the word is found in the LXX. The only other non-LXX occurrence of the term is the non-cultic setting of the expiatory and propitiatory death of the seven brothers on behalf of Israel (4 Maccabees 17.22 ). In the LXX however 'hilasterion' can refer to a place, the well-known cover of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim in the ritual of the annual day of atonement. It can therefore be regarded as a noun (to hilasterion) and mean the 'lid of expiation' or the 'mercy-seat'. It is better however to regard 'hilasterion' as an adjective agreeing with 'Jesus'. Thus Jesus is the person through whom expiation is effected rather than the place where it was made.

Dodd examines the associated verb 'hilaskesthai' in the LXX and concludes that it means 'to perform an act whereby guilt or defilement is removed.' /18 He adds that the idea "of placating an angry God... is foreign to biblical usage." /19 The weakness of Dodd's investigation is that it isolates 'hilaskesthai' from its immediate contexts. In many of these the 'wrath' of God is found as a prominent idea. Moreover so interwoven are the concepts of 'sin' and 'wrath' that in the OT "expiation has, as it were, the effect of propitiation." /20 'Hilaskesthai' can therefore carry the meaning "to render God favourable." /21. It is probable that in Paul's mind 'expiation' as well as 'propitiation' are linked with the sacrifice of Jesus. As Bultmann suggests, the death of Jesus is "a propitiatory sacrifice by which the forgiveness of sins is brought about." /22 In the Cross

Therefore Paul demonstrates the reality of human guilt, the reality of divine wrath, and yet at the same time the overwhelming reality of forgiving love.

### The outworking of God's anger within history.

Because Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus as the first act in the drama of the end-time, salvation and judgment are to some extent anticipated in Jesus. Even now men can be on the road to salvation or destruction, depending on their response to the Gospel (1 Cor 1.18; 15.2). The verdict of acquittal usually associated with the day of judgment can even now be pronounced over the man who has placed his trust in God's Son. He need fear neither condemnation nor the wrath to come (Romans 8.1; 1 Thess 1.10).

We have already referred to the reality of divine wrath working itself out in the world of contemporary paganism (Romans 1.18ff), but Paul can also see God's anger manifested in his temporary rejection of Israel (Romans 9-11). As in the past, so now also God is free to demonstrate his mercy or wrath according to his sovereign will, and even in temporarily rejecting Israel his purpose is to bring the nations to himself and ultimately to win Israel back. Throughout this section in Romans 9-11 Paul only makes direct reference to God's anger in chapter nine, 19-22 but he also uses many metaphors such as God 'hardening', 'rejecting', 'breaking off', 'not sparing' which have a long association in the OT with wrath. Beyond this experience of divine wrath, God's purpose is to have mercy on all (11.32).

Paul teaches that God's wrath can be presently experienced through the legal processes of the state (Romans 13. 4-5). He sees the Roman authorities as part of God's purpose in the ordering of society for the welfare of all its citizens. Through the state and the judicial system which it upholds, God's purpose is to keep evil in check and encourage obedience to the law. The state is 'God's minister, and



it is the just wrath of God which is acting through it.' /23

In all of these ways Paul can detect the righteous anger of God active within the world.

### The coming wrath of God at the end of history.

As a Jew Paul shared with Judaism the belief in the coming day of judgment. As a Christian he associates it with the parousia of Christ. The crucified and risen Lord, offered to men in the Gospel will confront them as Judge or Saviour, depending on man's response to him. For the man in Christ there is no longer fear of condemnation or wrath (Romans 8.1; 1 Thess 1.10) but for the man who is not in Christ the judgment is 'a day of wrath when God's righteous anger will be revealed.' (Romans 2.5). Every person will be judged on the basis of his works that is, the sum total of his life in which the most important ingredient is the decision 'for' or 'against' the God revealed in Christ.

But what content does Paul consider the eschatological wrath to have? He never uses the Judaistic concept of Gehenna (Hell) which Jesus expressed perhaps because as apostle to the Gentiles, it was not readily appreciated by his non-Jewish audiences. But he does make it clear that eschatological wrath is the opposite of salvation (1 Thess 5.9). In short it is 'eternal exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.' (2 Thess 1.9)

On other occasions Paul speaks of 'eternal destruction' (Phil 1.28; 3.19), 'they shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.' (2 Thess 1.9) In 2 Thess 1.9 Paul has built up this definition of eschatological wrath from various OT terms, all associated with God's anger (Isaiah 66.15; Jer 10.25; Ps 79.6). What does he mean by 'destruction'? He means 'the loss of a life of blessedness after death, future misery.' /24 It does not mean 'the

extinction of physical existence but rather an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death in the depiction of which such terms as 'wrath', 'fury', 'tribulation' and 'distress' are used." /25

The picture therefore presented by Paul of the wrath to come is quite as awful as that given by Jesus. Paul makes it clear that it is the will of God that men find mercy and grace and so eternal life (Romans 2.4) but where these will not be received there is nothing else but wrath.

### Conclusion

To recapture a meaningful understanding of the justice and anger of God when confronted with evil is an essential for the church today. God's love and grace can be so divorced from his wrath that a conception of God can prevail which is "so genially tolerant as to be morally indifferent." /26 The Bible presents us with a different understanding of God as the one who commands the attention of men and presents them with alternatives which cannot be ignored. God's anger is a terrible reality which brings to nought every attempt by man to build his own life and the life of his community on the sand of sin, evil and injustice. God will not allow him to do so unchecked. To this the history of Israel, the depraved condition of Roman society in Paul's time, and the 'troubles' over the last decade in Northern Ireland bear eloquent testimony.

### Notes

1. C.H.Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, (London, 1963), p 49
2. op.cit. p 50
3. Gretner/Fichtner, on 'orge', TDNT Vol.V, p 411
4. Stühlin/Grundmann, on 'hamartano', TDNT, Vol 1, p 290.

5. D.S.Russell, Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, (London, 1964), p 380
6. C.E.B.Cranfield, Mark, (Cambridge, 1966) p 121
7. Ps. 75.8; Jer 15.15- 51.7; Ezek 23.31; Is 51.17; Zech. 12.2; Hab. 2.15-16; Obadiah 16.
8. Jer 7.29; Judges 6.13; 2 Kings 21.14; Isaiah 2.6; 49.11; Jer 12.7.
9. A.Richardson, Introduction to the Theology of the NT (London, 1958), p 77.
10. M.Kähler, quoted in TDNT Vol. 111, p 936.
11. TDNT, Vol 1, p 658.
12. op.cit. p. 50
13. Ibid, p 49.
14. A.T.Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb (London, 1957) p. 21
15. TDNT, Vol. V, p. 424
16. Karl Barth, Romans (ET, Oxford, 1968) p 43.
17. E. Brunner, The Mediator (London, 1934) p 449.
18. C.H.Dodd, op.cit. p 78
19. op.cit. p. 79
20. C.K.Barrett, Romans, (London, 1962), p 78.
21. D.Hill, Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings (Cambridge, 1967), p 25.
22. R.Bultmann, Theology of the NT (London, 1965), Vol 1, p 295
23. W.Sanday and A.C.Headlam, Romans, (Edinburgh, 1895) p 366
24. J.H.Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon (N.York, 1962) p 443
25. TDNT, Vol 1, p. 396
26. W.Temple, Nature, Man and God, (London, 1964), p 456



# REVIEWS

R.de Vaux.

The Early History of Israel Translated by D.Smith. Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1978 2 vol. £16

The English-speaking student of the history of Israel in biblical times has been well catered for in 1977 and 1978, with first Hayes and Miller, Israelite and Judean History, and now the translation of de Vaux's magisterial Histoire Ancienne d'Israël. With these two works to hand the student is well-equipped indeed. Both reflect and enter into dialogue with the earlier "standard" histories of M.Noth and J.Bright. Hayes and Miller seek to offer an up-to-date assessment of the present status of scholarly discussion; but with de Vaux we have the work of a single mind, offering us his own synthesis and with his own path through the labyrinth. The thoughtful reader might wonder about the usefulness of de Vaux: the French scholar's great reputation should not blind us to the fact that not one word of his two volumes was written later than 1971 (the year of his death) nor to the restricted scope of the work, which ends with the period of the judges. De Vaux had planned a three-volume history, but his sudden death robbed us of two of the three: a truncated volume 2 (it should have reached the exile) was later rescued from his papers and published in 1973. (The English publishers have sensibly redivided the material, to give us two volumes of equal size).

Granted these deficiencies, however, we still have every reason to be grateful to the translator and to the publishers. While one regrets the loss of the later part of the projected work, it is precisely the very early period which is the most difficult and problematic, so that de Vaux's guidance is most useful here; moreover, his many articles had more to offer on this period than on later epochs. One feels that he lived long enough to write the most important and valuable half of the work which he had planned. The fact that some eight years of discovery and research have passed since he wrote is a more serious issue; his encycloped-

References to other literature must now be supplemented and brought up-to-date. This fact of time and progress is inevitable. However there are two mitigating factors. In the first place, a great deal of de Vaux's treatment consists in the handling and exegesis of the biblical texts, which will not date nearly so rapidly as archaeological data. The biblical texts themselves do not change, and de Vaux's careful, cautious, sober and honest treatment of them may prove to be extremely durable. In eight years, at any rate, few of his views and conclusions have received widespread or severe criticism. Secondly one feels that there is a sense in which the basic data for the early period of Israel's history are already to hand; unless there is some unforeseen and dramatic discovery to be made (a thirteenth century BC Qumran, so to speak!), it is unlikely that new discoveries and new refinements of archaeological technique will greatly alter the total picture. It is doubtful if we shall ever have proof about, say, Israel's conquest of Jericho or Ai- or even Hazor, for the matter, whatever the probabilities. Therefore the marshalling of the evidence and the weighing of the arguments undertaken by de Vaux may well prove to have a permanent validity.

De Vaux's reputation rests upon the combination of knowledge, judgement and lucidity which he brought to the study of the Old Testament. His knowledge of Palestine and its archaeology was unrivalled, for he lived and taught there for almost forty years. His own footnotes testify to the extent of his contributions to archaeological discussion over these many years. Nobody could accuse him either of ignorance of archaeology or of neglect of its findings (a charge sometimes levelled at Noth). In this respect his work stands closer to that of Bright. He demonstrated his powers of judgment in his clear recognition that the historian's basic method must be the correct understanding of the Old Testament- and in this respect he fully agreed with Noth. His endeavour was to find a middle way between Noth and Bright. He sought a truer balance between the findings of biblical scholarship and those of excavation, and to avoid both the scepticism of Noth

and the over-conservatism of Bright - or rather, the latter's too facile conclusion that archaeology supports the essential historicity of the Old Testament historical books. De Vaux shows himself to be fully aware of the gap between the Old Testament statements, on the one hand, and the archaeological data, on the other; yet his own reconstruction remains relatively conservative. It is a conservatism which commands respect, for it is based on no preconceptions nor wishful thinking; he was not afraid to change his mind and to say so. His discussion of Genesis 14 is interesting for this reason. In this his final review of the chapter he states frankly that he can no longer assert its historicity (volume 1, p. 219). But whereas he can give no credence to Genesis 14 in particular, he is willing to extract a good deal of historical information from Genesis about the patriarchs as a whole; in fact he is not ashamed to begin his history a full hundred years before the period Noth considered the earliest practicable point in time. He is prepared to give a date to the era of the patriarchs (19th- 16th centuries BC), to identify them (as Amorites rather than Aramaeans), and even to characterise their religion (as monolatry). He finds arguments to support the biblical traditions linking Abraham with both Ur and Haran.

Similarly in the case of Joseph: the story took shape at no early date (the reign of Solomon, in de Vaux's view), but "this early tradition must have a historical basis" (p. 313). Here as elsewhere however, the picture de Vaux accepts is much more complex than the one the Old Testament offers: Joseph cannot be dated, because different Israelites (to use the term anachronistically) were entering Egypt from before the Hyksos era till almost the time of Moses.

Where Moses is concerned, de Vaux is at pains to reach a conclusion to the question posed by G. von Rad, whether the Sinai tradition and the Exodus-Conquest tradition were originally quite distinct. After careful analysis and argument, he decides against this hypothesis; but it is evident that he thought the issue finely balanced, and his ruthless honesty can



be seen in his dismissal of the argument based on the content of vassal-treaties, which he must have been tempted to utilise

The most important part of Volume 2 and arguably of the whole work, is the detailed treatment of the Conquest, or rather "the Settlement in Canaan" (L'Installation). The difficulty and complexity of the question are notorious, and we have nowadays several hypotheses to choose from. Nowhere does de Vaux show his voluminous learning and his clear and coherent grasp of essentials better than in this section. Broadly he argues in favour of the Alt-Noth theory that the settlement in Canaan was to a large extent one of peaceful infiltration, but he allows for more battles and conquests of cities than they did.

This brief outline of some aspects of the work should serve to indicate the writer's outlook and major conclusions; but here we have a history to be read in depth and detail, not merely quoted as an authority. It has been called the 'testament' of this great scholar and it should be valued as such. It deserves to be no less a vade mecum than his other much-used volume, Ancient Israel: Its life and institutions.

Queen's University,  
Belfast.

D.F. Payne

D.R.G. Beattie      JEWISH EXEGESIS OF THE  
BOOK OF RUTH.

JSOT Supplement Series 2, Sheffield 1977.  
Pp.xii, 251

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This book is divided into three sections. Part I describes the Source Documents, and is further divided into 'Ancient Versions, Midrashic Literature and Mediaeval Commentaries, though this is little more than a brief introduction to these documents - twelve pages only being devoted to Septuagint, Peshitta, Targum and Josephus - and merely whets the appetite. In Part II, Beattie picks up the third sub-division of Part I and translates from the mediaeval Hebrew the commentaries of Salmon ben Yeroham, Rashi, an anonymous Rabbi, Abraham ibn Ezra and David Qimhi. Part III reflects upon the manner of exegesis and interpretation found in Parts I and II, and classifies the various types of treatment found there.

The author is equipped to write a serious commentary on the book, and may well do so, but he has chosen, at least initially, to publish the results of his doctoral research, and for this we are grateful. There are too many superficial commentaries written today, and even the more profound tend to ignore at least some of the material treated here by Beattie. One may find an interest in the Hebrew Vorlage of the Septuagint etc. and one may light upon the odd reference to the Talmud, but on the whole the interest in the past is confined to textual criticism rather than to exegesis as revealed in the Versions etc. The mediaeval commentaries are virtually a closed book to many students of the Bible, and, regrettably, these include Bible commentators. In writing a commentary on Ruth commentators would do well to acquaint themselves with the exegetical stance and the contribution of the mediaevalists

translated here by Beattie, and to take note of the development in the history of exegesis dealt with in Part III. One may question Qoheneleth's dictum that there is nothing new under the sun - one has to in research - but sometimes one finds in the mediaeval commentaries interpretations which are merely echoed by the moderns, though put forward by the latter as new and incisive insights. It follows that the study of those who have gone before, so to speak, is a healthy corrective as well as an informative exercise.

When one thinks of early exegesis the name of Jerome and other Christian commentators comes to mind. Naturally one cannot include the Vulgate or Christian commentaries in a work entitled: 'Jewish Exegesis of the Book of Ruth', but the question does arise as to how Beattie defines 'Jewish Exegesis'. It would appear that he would have to define it in terms of the work of a Jewish exegete or translator, and yet he includes the Syriac translation/paraphrase without first establishing its Jewish origin. The fact that it is closely related to the Septuagint merely begs the question, for Aquila produced his translation in the second century because it was thought that the Septuagint, which originated in Jewish circles, had become corrupt through the influence of the Christian Church which had adopted it as its Bible.

R.B. Salters  
(St. Andrews)



12  
P. L. Pryke Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel  
(SNTS Monograph Series 33  
Cambridge University Press, 1978):  
pp. 190 £10.

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In the redaction-critical approach to the Gospels the evangelists are examined not simply as collectors and transmitters of tradition, but as authors in their own right, from whose selection, arrangement and editorial methods inferences may be drawn about the author himself, his community and his conception of the gospel. In this type of investigation literary analysis and theological interpretation have been drawn closely together: but purely linguistic features may also provide criteria by which the accuracy of the literary delineation may be tested or rejected. So far as Mark's Gospel is concerned, it has been for long agreed that it is in the connecting links (or 'seams') that Mark's editorial hand is most obvious, but the redaction-critics have not been slow to argue that his contribution was considerably greater than that. In his book Dr. Pryke has examined in minute detail fourteen syntactical features of Mark's style to see if what was thought previously to be characteristic of the whole Gospel and evidence of a homogeneous style throughout may in fact be due to the work of the editor himself when he linked up oral or written sources. Among the syntactically unusual features of Marcan usage investigated are parenthetical clauses, the genitive absolute, the participle used as a main verb, polla accusative, lego hoti and archomai with the infinitive. On the basis of these and other features of Marcan usage, together with the one hundred and forty words which Pryke claims are characteristic of the writer, the author argues that almost all of the verses categorised by earlier scholars as editorial mainly on literary and form-critical grounds are

confirmed as redactional by means of his linguistic and vocabulary criteria. Thus he is enabled to reconstruct in full a hypothetical redactional text of Mark's, which occupies twenty-five pages of his book and comprises just under half of the Gospel.

In assessing the value of this highly technical study the reviewer would draw attention to two significant weaknesses, one concerning the method of investigation and the other concerning the results. By investigating Marcan redaction in the way Dr. Pryke does there is a definite circularity in the argument. A good many of the verses or parts of verses regarded as redactional and listed at the outset as such are adjudged to be so by Vincent Taylor and others, by reason of the presence in them of characteristic features of Marcan style and vocabulary: it is therefore not surprising that Pryke's linguistic tests confirm their editorial character. Secondly, a major problem is presented by the verses which Pryke excludes from his reconstructed redactional text, for it is difficult to see how, in any single instance, they could have circulated independently of their Marcan setting. For instance, if Mark inherited any tradition about John the Baptist it must have been more than verses 5, 7, 9b, 11b and 13 of the first chapter, which is all that Pryke regards as non-redactional. Again in chapter six, could verses 46, 49, 50b and 51 comprise the total oral (or written) tradition concerning Jesus' walking on the water? Is it credible to suggest that possibly every word in the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus is redactional? Examples like these raise an awkward and embarrassing question: once it is admitted that any of the redactional material is simply Mark's version of material which he found in other words in his sources, on what grounds can any verse in the Gospel be regarded

as merely editorial? Are we not forced back to the view pioneered by C.H. Turner that the characteristic features of Marcan usage are indeed evidence of a homogeneous style throughout the Gospel - and that the style of Mark? Whether that be so or not, the amount of material in Mark's Gospel claimed by Pryke to be redactional is too much to be likely by any responsibly-applied criteria. Despite the fact that it fails to be wholly convincing, this book will be a valuable tool in the hands of those who are engaged in the delicate and difficult study of the redactional element in our second Gospel.

DAVID HILL

(Sheffield University)

**S. Smalley. JOHN - Evangelist & Interpreter.**  
Exeter: Paternoster Press. 1978. pp 285. £7.00

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Mr. Smalley has read extensively in Johannine Literature and this is reflected throughout the book; however it is not just a review of current work, though it supplies this: Smalley uses the views of others in order to set out his own. From one who comes from the conservative wing it represents a full acceptance of the methods of modern scholarship but not a surrender to every current fad. He covers all the areas one would expect to find in the introduction to a commentary, viz., authorship, date, purpose etc. In each case the evidence is surveyed, the work of other scholars considered and conclusions developed; useful summaries every few pages state these conclusions.



In company with an increasing number of scholars Smalley accepts the arguments of P. Gardner-Smith that the Fourth Evangelist did not know the Synoptic Gospel. We would agree with him here but would want to note that the Evangelist appears to know the gospel form and to remember that there were gospels in existence other than the synoptics (cf. Lk. 1.1-4). He further argues that 'If the Johannine tradition is independent, its claim to be historically valuable is high'. The second half of this sentence does not follow from the first though Smalley seems to take it as obvious. Some of the infancy gospels of the second century are independent of the synoptic tradition but are historically worthless. More positively he concludes 'that John's ethos is at root more in touch with Judaism than Hellenism ... the Hellenistic features of the Fourth Gospel tell us more about its final audience, that is to say, than the background of its author or its tradition (p.67)

The gospel was written in the period 85-100 A.D., probably at Ephesus. It is dependent upon the tradition of John, the apostle, who is to be identified with the Beloved Disciple who brought the Jesus-tradition to Ephesus. He is the eye-witness on whose testimony the evangelical tradition rests. 'The disciple or disciples of John ... committed to writing the traditions' (p.120) which he had brought. This was a writing somewhat similar to the gospel as it exists today and contained what is now recognised as Johannine thought. After the death of the Beloved Disciple the church at Ephesus 'published a finally edited version of the gospel'. (p.120) The prologue and chapter 21 were now added and some of the discourses were edited. Within this three-stage development Smalley finds no place for either a signs source or a discourse source.

The gospel was not written to replace, interpret, or supplement the Synoptic Gospels, though in fact it may do these things, nor to restate the Christian Gospel in 'hellenised terms'. It is not primarily polemical or liturgical. The Evangelist's purpose in writing was not evangelical in the narrow sense of 'missionary', but in the more profound sense of 'pastoral'. His Gospel was designed to meet the needs of two groups within the community who were 'discovering their apparent mutual incompatibility'. On the one hand there were Jewish-Christians who had come out of the synagogue and professed commitment to Jesus, but who still felt a loyalty to their Jewish heritage. As a result these Christians may have thought that Jesus was less than fully divine. 'On the other hand there were Hellenistic-Christians ... who were still influenced by their pagan religious background ... These Christians may have thought that Jesus was less than fully human.' (p.147) Curiously Smalley holds that the book 'did little to lessen the tensions which ... troubled the Johannine church' (p.148), and yet at the same time argues that 'the balanced christology of John's gospel was at the time exactly what they needed' (p.148). Surely they needed something which would have succeeded in reconciling their differences. It turns out later that Smalley is himself very enthusiastic about the christology of John's gospel!

John was loyal to the fundamental Christian preaching, as set out, say by Dodd, and the Gospel is essentially similar in its theology to Paul and Mark. The Evangelist expanded 'the "historical" section of the kerygma, to show what happened when the Word became flesh' (p.160) It thus contains independent yet dependable history. (It could also be said that in comparison with the Synoptic Gospels John shrinks the historical section through the addition of interpretative discourse material). The form of his gospel shows

that 'John is interested in history, and takes it seriously' (p. 171). That John takes history seriously does not however establish the accuracy of the facts he records and though Smalley continually asserts the historical accuracy of his writing yet he fails to demonstrate it in any detail. He discusses the wedding at Cana yet seems to conclude (pp. 177f.) that the authentic historical base made no reference to the miracle. It is also difficult to see from his discussion of the raising of Lazarus whether he believes this actually happened. He fails also to give any satisfying discussion of the differences between the Synoptics and John.

But John is an interpreter as well as one who uses historical material. As interpretation John writes a drama rather than a biography. Smalley runs through the various theological themes of christology, pneumatology, etc., summarising the views of others and giving his own. He shows that John's theology represents a 'considerable advance in the interpretation of New Testament Christianity' (p. 228). And John adds 'a new but legitimate dimension to the story of Jesus' (p. 244). 'By holding together the pre-existence and real manhood of Jesus, John was providing the materials from which (however satisfactorily) traditional Christianity could be fashioned - both in the early church and right down to our day' (p. 246). Smalley seems to assume too easily that John's christology is the right christology for today; to defend that he would probably say that he would need to write another book.

This is a valuable book. It can be put in the hands of students safely as representing a reasoned conservative position. Those who wish to survey the literature and bring themselves up to date will find it very useful. It can be recommended. To the criticisms we have already made we may add one or two more. It is not at



It is clear at times what Smalley means when he uses the word 'John'. He allows for more than one stage in development and for more than one person as active in some of these stages. When Smalley moves outside the sphere of the Gospel of John he tends to be more conservative. Sometimes he establishes the possibility of a certain theory, but then goes on to draw deductions as if he had in fact shown its actuality (beware of his 'ifs'). Finally I am hesitant about his discussion of the nature of history.

ERNEST BEST

Pastor Nicoli. 'PERSECUTED BUT NOT FORSAKEN'  
St. Andrew Press. 1977. pp.176. £1.95

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This is the true story of a church behind the Iron Curtain. For security reasons the incidents as recorded are drawn from various experiences and situations and are a composite as is the character of Vladimir, the young pastor in the story. The sequence of events and the identity of the persons and places are altered and disguised for obvious reasons by Pastor Nicoli, the author, who himself once ministered in Eastern Europe.

The book is a very readable account with moving and often humorous incidents to illustrate what really is a success story for the people of God behind the Iron Curtain, led by their enthusiastic and venturesome young pastor. To read this book gives some insight to the ideological struggle confronting mankind. Here we see the all-encompassing power of communist rule and at the same time the difficulties that face Christians living under communist dictatorship.

There are three main participants in the story. First there is Vladimir the handsome

young pastor who emerges as devout, courageous and adroit. Further he shows himself to be vulnerable to the good looks and charms of the young lady he is to marry in spite of all the difficulties. The second group are the members of the Christian community and their faith and dedication enables them to maintain a deep loyalty to Christ in spite of all their problems. Both pastor and people know what it is like to suffer physically for Christ in beatings and threats on their lives. Indeed one of the believers was beaten to death and, in a different incident, Pastor Vladimir was almost beaten to death.

Both State church and believers of the non-conformist church were persecuted because communist powers regarded both as church and therefore an enemy of the State. Persecution was severe but different from place to place. In the city it would seem there is more freedom whereas in proud little mountain towns like Rudopol life was difficult for the Christian community. It was to such a church and community Vladimir came from the city to serve. This must have been a difficult choice for him and probably represented many such situations that church members face behind the Iron Curtain.

The third group portrayed in the book are the communists and their rulers. As one would expect they do not come out in a good light. People are free to believe what they are told or to believe. To be identified with the Christian church means that opportunities are limited. The best jobs go to communists and Christians who are fortunate enough to hold any position have no hope of advancement. There are attempts made to appear to be democratic but any who step out of line are liable to have a visit under cover of darkness.

The story keeps one's interest to the end, showing the church in action behind the Iron Curtain and the progress it makes in spite of

problems. For sure the book raises the problem as to how far the church in such situations can or should acknowledge the authority of their communist rulers. It would appear that if they are to survive they have little choice. Perhaps the book does tend towards simplistic characterisation, painting things in black and white, and this is especially true in the love story between Vladimir and the one who was to become his bride.

Not great literature but make interesting reading because of the insights it gives to the work and witness of the church in a pressure situation. Implicit in this, too, is the question of how far Christian principles have to be maintained and what is to happen when they clash with the authorities. How far can conscience be stretched and when is it time to say "Enough is enough". These are issues that in various forms can present themselves to Christians living in the East and West. It is possible we may not agree with the way the issues were faced by the young pastor and his people but at least it presents the issue and for this the book is worth reading.

A. HAROLD GRAHAM

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## Review

Karl Rahner: Foundations of Christian Faith  
 An Introduction to the idea of  
 Christianity Darton, Longman  
 & Todd Ltd. 1978 pp i-iv, 470 £14.00

Karl Rahner is one of the most distinguished of modern German Roman Catholic theologians. He has not written any Dogmatics but a series of essays on a great variety of subjects in Systematic Theology reaching to fifteen volumes in all and entitled 'Theological Investigations'. The present large volume of 'Foundations' is a summary of most of the main doctrines of the Christian faith. It is in fact an attempt to say what it means to be a Christian in today's world. Both perspectives therefore must continually be kept in view - not with any thought of submitting the essence of the faith to the modern world view but rather with that of the maximum possible correlation of the two.

With increasing specialisation in every aspect of theological work and the impossibility of any one person being an expert in each and yet with the need for some kind of statement which will both sum up the faith and present it in comprehensible terms to modern man, Rahner speaks of the need for a statement which will be available for all. He distinguishes three levels of perception, that of the simple believer who largely and unreflectingly accepts the fundamental teachings of the Roman Catholic church, that of reflexive thinking on the basis of the faith put in summary form and that of a more developed fundamental and dogmatic theology. This book is an attempt to write at the second level so that both theologian and informed layman may grasp in some kind of unity the idea of Christianity and relate it to present day thought. Rahner has three intertwined perspectives in his work, first, traditional Roman Catholic dogma which he seeks to affirm and re-state; secondly the modern field of biblical and dogmatic studies which he masters well and uses widely; and thirdly the perspective



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of modern man in his life and thought and the possibility of an apologetic from the perspective of faith for him.

While Rahner denies that this is in any sense a summary of his previous writings but sees it rather as a different kind of summary of the faith on which he has reflected during his lifetime, nevertheless it can scarcely be denied that here we have his thought in nuce. What the average intelligent Christian will make of it is hard to see, since it is written in a very difficult, abstruse style like his other works and presupposes a considerable knowledge of large areas of current theological thought.

Rahner is best when interpreting basic Roman Catholic teaching whether it be on the person of Christ, the church or man and his sin. Again the way in which he criticises Roman Catholic 'School' or catechism teaching in the light of modern biblical scholarship is illuminating and helpful. One example will suffice. Traditional teaching was that any member of the Trinity could have become incarnate, but Rahner argues a posteriori that since only the Word or Son became man, it is impossible to speculate as did previous theology. Again as far as the Trinity is concerned, he sees the being of God in his revelation as the true God as he is - the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and God is only one as triune.

Accepting that one does in a sense argue in a circle, that is, from within the realm of faith itself interpreting the Christian revelation, the question Rahner raises which forms the context of his book as of the whole of his theological enterprise is this: can one not only have a proper statement of Systematic Theology, a correct interpretation of dogma and the Christian tradition but also provide a relevant apologetics for modern man? Rahner believes one can though he rejects the Thomist arguments for the existence of God. In their place he suggests what he calls an essential transcendentalism or to put it otherwise an anthropological framework for a Christian apologia. It runs something like this: there is in man

essential self-transcendence into God by means of God's self-communication, a self-transcendence gratuitously made possible by God. This can be seen to be true of every man and points to the Christian revelation. Rahner argues that from the perspective of faith one can point out that God is active revealing himself to man outside the sphere of the church and elevating man to himself who is the basic mystery of life. Or, if one puts it in christological terms, the person of Christ is seen in the perspective of an evolutionary Christianity, that is, that man evolves towards God as God approaches and addresses himself to man. It is when God and man meet in perfect union and communion that we see the process in its fulfilment and we have in the hypostatic union between God and man in Jesus Christ the perfection of this union. Yet Rahner argues that this union is unique; it is unrepeatable and irreversible and all other signs which point in this direction are but approximations to this. Rahner would reject the argument that his position leads inexorably to us all becoming little christs since Christ is unique. All that we are doing in positing an anthropological basis and transcendental Christology is arguing not simply a posteriori from the datum of revelation a priori or asking "about the conditions or possibility in us which enable it to affect us". He writes, "Transcendental Christology is also necessary, a Christology which asks about a priori possibilities in man which make the coming of the message of Christ possible". It allows one to search for, and in his search to understand what he has already found in Jesus of Nazareth. So Rahner is attempting to do two things here, to affirm the traditional truth that in Jesus Christ we have God and man and at the same time to see if one can find any reasonable a priori possibility of this in man and in his condition. He finds this in the evolution of man towards God and the coming of God to man, which is a factor he believes of all life.

There are however serious problems with this whole approach. Certainly a genuine attempt is made to relate a redemption to life in general and to creation

in particular and to ask how God is active outside the sphere of salvation and the church. Some argue that we must believe in order to understand and Rahner does this to a large extent too, but he moves on to make the more dubious statement that nonetheless one can begin to some extent outside conscious faith and sees its rationale since all are really anonymous Christians if they accept the thrust and call to self-transcendence and to God. Again he admits fully that there is such a thing as human sin which can abort this and man may deny his true reality and destiny. But given a proper use of his freedom he must come to the wholeness of Roman Catholic faith and see how reasonable this is. Faith and the apologia for it belong together. There does seem however here to be an unresolved tension between the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and its interpretation on the one hand and the anthropological basis Rahner seeks to give it on the other. There is further the danger and in fact the possibility that the faith is interpreted in the light of the latter, though Rahner's strong traditional Christology and Dogmatics make this less possible for him. Moreover one would have thought that the proper framework of the Christian revelation was not so much the world and man in general but God's particular relations and dealings with the people of Israel as a background for the incarnation.

Again the basis of all this is a desire to give man his true autonomy and freedom and a failure adequately to affirm the bondage of the will apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In other words Rahner's position while criticised in some details by other Roman Catholic theologians is an attempt to combine revelation and reason in a modern fashion and in many ways fits in well to Roman Catholic teaching particularly on man's freewill.

Two further comments are called for. How does Rahner view his basically Roman Catholic position viz-a-viz a reformed theology? He argues unconvincingly either that there is now no essential difference, for

example, on the view of grace, or that really the Reformers ought to have known better and should have been able to accept the true Roman Catholic teaching; but, despite his remarks, the differences remain on the Roman Catholic's greater emphasis on man and freewill, the whole question of anthropology, on the teaching of justification and its proper relation to sanctification and on the emphasis of the sole authority of the scriptures.

The other is that since this book is really about being a Christian it warrants comparison with the now well-known book of Hans KÜNG of this title. Each gives central place to Christology- Rahner at least a third of his work and each tries to replace traditional natural theology with a more modern version- KÜNG more briefly and Rahner giving to it the whole framework of his book. KÜNG's is by far the more lucid and readable and less Roman Catholic and his Christology is a functional one. Here Rahner is the more traditional since he believes in an ontological view, that is, that one must speak not only of what Christ does but of who he is in his being. Rahner's is the more profound and original work, but KÜNG's can be more easily put in the hands of the intelligent reader. However a student of Reformed theology could, on many counts, scarcely be entirely happy with either.

Union Theological College,  
Belfast

JOHN THOMPSON



This latest book by Smith could be said to link up with the quest for the historical Jesus, claiming to be a new approach aimed at both scholar and layman. Technical details are confined to 46 pages of notes at the back of the book. There is no index. The lucid and free flowing style does however make for easy reading.

"There are always two sides to an argument"-thus begins the first chapter. It would appear that in relation to the Gospels Smith seeks a contrary view of Jesus to that generally held - ie the other side of the argument. At first sight Smith appears to put forward a view of the historical Jesus as he really was. He restores the Christ of faith to the lifetime of Jesus(p.5). He sees the Gospels as materials from which we can construct the kind of Jesus who gave rise to the churches- not just the kind of churches that preserved the Gospels(p.5). Miracles are again seen as respectable. Jesus' opponents accuse him of using magical means for his miracles. At the time miracles were part of the widespread phenomenon of magic. This gives them in Smith's view a high degree of historical probability. They are thus no longer to be viewed as inventions of the Hellenistic church but they can be located in Palestinian soil and in the ministry of Jesus.

According to Smith, Jesus' real enemies were the scribes and the key to understanding their charges is magic. Such charges contain many embarrassing details, unlikely to be created by Jesus' followers, and must belong to the actual situation of Jesus(p.27ff). Thus the book is summarised as "a penetrating attack on the historicity of the Gospels".

Smith throughout his work is opposed to anything that partakes of the supernatural. If Jesus is seen as a god, a Son of God, a magician, Smith can explain: "All three of them are expressions of propaganda and each is inherently incredible, since they all explain the phenomena of Jesus' life in terms of a mythological world of deities and demons that do not exist."(p.149) Further "demon and spirit were in vulgar usage inter-

changeable (p.144). Miracles like exorcisms and healings have explanations like 'Jesus could not cast out demons; there are none'(p.149). Nature miracles are rejected out of hand e.g., feeding the five thousand, calming the storm, turning water into wine. Miracles that find acceptance are those that can be performed by suggestion(p.152). The Gospel traditions in his view originally contained many more magical details but these have been removed by an anti-magic group. Behind such primary magical elements stands Jesus. Only by removing the moralising and theologising elements can we find the original magical elements in whose light the Gospels are to be understood. Thus many spurious sayings have been attributed to Jesus(p.129). Smith constantly reads magical elements where he finds opportunity e.g., in the word 'deceiver'(Mt 27.63), 'evildoer'(John 18.30) (cf. pp.42,33,41). In connection with the latter term he quotes the Latin equivalent 'maleficus' which in the fifth and sixth centuries had the meaning 'magician'. Thus he has 'proof' that Jesus was executed as a magician.

Some of the interpretations seem quite incredible e.g., that Jesus put Satan in the piece of bread for Judas and so put Satan in Judas' heart! The Eucharist becomes a rite of union between the magician-god and his followers(p.123), and the Lord's prayer a series of magical incantations(p.131f). If Smith describes Jesus as 'magician', it is because it can be demythologised and rendered innocuous. It simply comes to denote 'psychotherapist'.

Some criticisms may be offered. Smith makes use of magical materials that belong to a period later than Jesus. It is hardly correct method to claim that because certain actions and words of Jesus can be paralleled in magical materials, that they show Jesus to be a magician. Smith's presuppositions lead him to a drastic treatment of the Gospel records as cooked up material, eliminating previous magical material. This is hardly evident from the Gospels as we have them. Much of what Smith says has been said before e.g., that Jesus was the son of a Galilaean adulteress and

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FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
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IN GREAT BRITAIN  
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## Contributors

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All contributions should be sent direct to the  
Editor, at      Union Theological College  
                  Botanic Avenue  
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